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# Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

Provisional

**7020**th meeting
Tuesday, 20 August 2013, 10 a.m.
New York

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| *President:* | Mrs. Perceval | (Argentina) |
| *Members:* | Australia | Mr. Quinlan |
| | Azerbaijan | Mr. Musayev |
| | China | Mr. Wang Min |
| | France | Mr. Lamek |
| | Guatemala | Mr. Rosenthal |
| | Luxembourg | Mr. Maes |
| | Morocco | Mr. Loulichki |
| | Pakistan | Mr. Masood Khan |
| | Republic of Korea | Mr. Kim Sook |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Pankin |
| | Rwanda | Mr. Manzi |
| | Togo | Mr. M'Beou |
| | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Mr. Parham |
| | United States of America | Mrs. DiCarlo |

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Fernandez-Taranco.

**Mr. Fernandez-Taranco**: The Council meets again amid continued regional unrest, with a volatile situation in Egypt, a fragile Lebanon and ongoing turmoil in Syria. The Secretary-General has issued two statements in recent days regarding the situation in Egypt, and the Deputy Secretary-General briefed Council members last Thursday. The developments in Egypt and their regional implications continue to be of great concern and merit our close attention. In the period under review, we also witnessed a small but important opening for peace with the launch, last month, of resumed direct talks between Israelis and Palestinians. It has long been the belief of the United Nations that progress on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could have a positive impact on regional stability. That has become all the more critical in recent weeks against the backdrop of such troubling developments elsewhere in the region.

Efforts led by the United States Secretary of State over a four-month period culminated in a series of preparatory meetings between the negotiators in Washington, D.C., on 29 and 30 July, where parties agreed on an agenda that would cover all core final status issues and to working towards a comprehensive agreement within nine months. Those meetings were followed by a first formal round of talks in Jerusalem on 14 August, after the release of 26 pre-Oslo prisoners from Gaza and the West Bank, based on an Israeli Cabinet decision of 29 July. A second round took place between negotiators today in Jericho. In its statement of 30 July, the Quartet welcomed the resumption of talks and reiterated its members' shared commitment to helping the parties achieve a negotiated two-State solution within the agreed time frame. Quartet envoys intend to meet soon to discuss next steps.

It is against that background that the Secretary-General travelled to the region — to Jordan, Palestine and Israel — on 15 and 16 August to lend his personal support to the leaders on both sides. He has been encouraged by the seriousness of the efforts to bring the parties to the negotiating table after a prolonged political stalemate, and he has praised the determination of United States Secretary of State Kerry in that regard. He also welcomed the appointment of United States special envoy for Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations, Mr. Martin Indyk. He was particularly heartened by the bold decision of President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu to embark on direct dialogue, which remains the single most credible path to a solution. The Secretary-General found both Palestinian and Israeli leaderships recommitted to the vision of a two-State solution, which is clearly in the best interest of both peoples. His own message was that this is an opportunity neither could afford to miss. It is his firm belief that direct negotiations are the only way through which Palestinians can realize their rightful aspirations for an independent and viable Palestinian State. and Israelis can meet their legitimate security needs and finally become a crucial partner in the development of a stable and prosperous Middle East.

The Secretary-General continues to believe that a two-State solution can be achieved through negotiations that resolve permanent status issues such as borders, security, refugees and Jerusalem. For those negotiations to have a chance at success, they need to be meaningful, with a clear political horizon, and yield early dividends in the immediate period ahead.

The Secretary-General recognizes that the road ahead is fraught with obstacles. He has nevertheless appealed to political leaders on both sides, as well as to Palestinian and Israeli youth, to overcome their deep scepticism and embolden their leaders in efforts to shape the better future their peoples deserve. It is incumbent opon regional and international stakeholders to help the parties carry those efforts forward. Both sides now need to sustain an environment conducive to the peace process moving forward. The parties must refrain from actions that would risk undermining prospects during the negotiations, and there have to be visible improvements in the situation on the ground.

The reporting period witnessed a decrease in search and arrest operations conducted by Israeli security forces; 229 such operations in the West Bank resulted in 276 Palestinians arrested. A total of 88 Palestinian civilians were injured by Israeli forces, including 20 children and 5 women. Two Israeli soldiers were injured by Palestinians. However, in a worrisome development, on 19 August, 39 Palestinians, including 18 children, were forcibly evicted and their homes were destroyed in what appears to be a significant increase in demolitions in East Jerusalem during the reporting period. At least six other structures were also demolished today in Area C.

As reported last month, the Israeli authorities implemented a number of measures aimed at easing access for Palestinians from the rest of the West Bank to East Jerusalem during the holy month of Ramadan. Israeli authorities also partially opened the historic access road into Hebron city from the south to Palestinian traffic, which had been closed for the last 12 years, citing security concerns for nearby settlers. Though limited, such measures represent important steps forward at this crucial moment in the political process. The Secretary-General was encouraged by indications from the Israeli authorities of additional measures in the planning to further ease restrictions on Palestinian movement and access, whether of people or goods.

At the same time, the Secretary-General remained deeply troubled by Israel's continuing settlement activity in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, referencing recent announcements of the approval of some 2,000 housing units. The position of the United Nations on settlements being against international law remains firm. Furthermore, settlement activity deepens mistrust, undermines efforts to advance peace and will ultimately render a two-State solution impossible.

Continued settler violence is also disconcerting. On 25 July, Israeli settlers set fire to about 100 Palestinian-owned olive trees in the village of Mikhmas, near Ramallah. Such violent attacks undermine the livelihoods of communities across the West Bank. I urge the Israeli authorities to ensure that all measures are taken ahead of the olive harvest later next month to protect Palestinians and their property and enable Palestinian access to their land to maintain their crops year-round.

The Secretary-General has welcomed the Israeli Cabinet's decision on the release of pre-Oslo prisoners. He nevertheless remains concerned about the fate of some 5,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, especially those on hunger strike — of which there are currently 10, after 4 Jordanians ended their strike — and those in administrative detention, who should be either tried or released.

In Ramallah, the Secretary-General met with the newly reappointed Palestinian Prime Minister, Rami Hamdallah, who was asked by President Abbas on 15 August to form a new Government within five weeks. He reiterated the United Nations commitment to ensuring the development of Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Gaza deserving of economic growth and recovery, with access to land, sea and resources. He further supported efforts to shore up the Palestinian economy and safeguard the important State-building achievements, issues that will be addressed in next month's meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians.

On the occasion of his visit, the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations signed the first-ever United Nations development assistance framework for the State of Palestine. Describing the collective United Nations response to national development priorities, the framework places the Palestinian people at the centre of development programming and empowers people to exercise human rights, enjoy access to basic services and achieve their right to an adequate standard of living.

The calm in Gaza has been tentative, with six projectiles shot at Israel, acts that we strongly condemn. Two Israeli incursions and one air strike were recorded during the reporting period. One Palestinian was killed while attempting to infiltrate Israel through the fence in the north-east of Al-Bureij refugee camp on 10 August, and six others were injured in similar situations, including three at sea. Three Palestinians were arrested on 17 August while attempting to swim towards Israel west of Beit Lahia. We call on Israel to show maximum restraint in such situations and make every effort to protect Palestinian civilians.

Gaza remains a high priority for the United Nations and must not be forgotten in the context of a resumed peace process. Despite early negative reactions, we express the hope that the Hamas de facto authorities

will not hamper efforts to achieve the two-State solution, which is the only opportunity for achieving lasting peace and ending the isolation of the Gaza Strip.

As a result of political developments in Egypt, access through Rafah has been restricted for security reasons. Combined with the long-standing restrictions on the free movement of people and goods via Israel, such measures have continued to have an adverse impact on the civilian population, including by limiting access to health care for some of the most vulnerable patients in Gaza and resulting in shortages in key medical supplies. The continued robust measures undertaken by the Egyptian authorities against illegal activity through tunnels into Gaza have also affected the availability of key commodities, in particular construction materials.

Access through legal crossings has therefore become all the more critical. The Secretary-General has seriously engaged relevant partners, including the Israeli authorities, at the request of the Palestinian Government, on further increasing access through legal crossings and in particular on liberalizing access of construction materials into Gaza. We are hopeful that positive steps in that regard will be taken soon. Such steps would further solidify the November ceasefire understanding, which calls for the lifting of closures and addressing of Israel's security concerns.

In the latest incident in the Sinai peninsula, yesterday we witnessed alarming news of an ambush on two minibuses, which killed 25 Egyptian police officers. The Secretary-General condemned the ambush, and the United Nations hopes that the perpetrators will be swiftly identified and brought to justice.

In a separate yet troubling development, three missiles were shot on the night of 12 August at the resort city of Eilat. Two missiles were intercepted by the Iron Dome system and no damage was reported. A terror group named Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis claimed responsibility for the attack. Such shootings are unacceptable and condemned in the strongest terms.

Let me turn to the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, where bloodshed continues unabated. The Government forces continue to use indiscriminate shelling and air strikes against densely populated civilian areas, with absolute disregard for the protection of civilians. For their part, armed opposition groups also continue to fail in their obligation to protect civilians, and many continue to engage in military operations within populated areas. Both warring sides also continue to commit acts of torture, abduction and kidnapping, at times along sectarian lines.

It is critical that both sides be reminded of their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law. It is important that all efforts be made to ensure that those committing international crimes, regardless of their rank, position or affiliation, will be held accountable.

Reports of military confrontations and displacement throughout the country along sectarian lines threaten to further unravel the social fabric of Syrian society. We are very concerned about incidents of kidnappings of clerics and of civilians in general. The continued influx of foreign fighters exacerbates sectarian and ethnic tensions and must be brought to an end.

Meanwhile, in the absence of a long-called-for political solution, humanitarian needs are growing by the minute, outpacing our efforts to respond. Well above 6.8 million Syrians now depend on humanitarian assistance. More than 4 million Syrians are estimated to be displaced inside their own country, and nearly 2 million Syrians are now registered and/or assisted as refugees in Syria's neighbouring countries. Over the past few days, the world has watched with grave concern the exodus of over 20,000 people from north-eastern Syria into Iraq.

Access to those in need continues to be a challenge. The United Nations and our humanitarian partners count on the Security Council to assist in facilitating access to all those in need inside Syria and neighbouring countries.

The position of the Secretary-General remains unchanged: there is no military solution to the conflict. The legitimate demands of the Syrian people for freedom and dignity will not be silenced by arms. Recent military victories by Government forces should not give the Government false confidence that it can win militarily. Likewise, promises of arms should not push the opposition towards different priorities or expectations other than a political solution. What is urgently needed is a political solution. In that regard, we continue to do our best to endeavour that the Geneva Conference takes place as soon as possible. Technical preparations are almost complete. We hope that the entire international community will remain committed to the process and contribute to its success, in word and in action.

The Secretary-General remains gravely concerned at the reports of alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. The United Nations mission to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, led by Mr. Åke Sellström, arrived in Damascus on Sunday, 18 August and began its work yesterday. As agreed with the Government, the team will conduct its activities in the country for a period of up to 14 days, extendable by mutual consent. The mission will contemporaneously investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons reported by the Government of Syria in Khan Al-Asal and two other allegations of the use of chemical weapons reported by Member States. The names of those two sites have been conveyed to the Syrian authorities following their acceptance of the modalities of the conduct of the mission. In parallel, the two parties will discuss other allegations and their related sites.

On the Golan, the situation remains volatile, with intense shelling and heavy clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition occurring inside the area of separation. From 17 August, clashes intensified in the area of separation, in particular, near United Nations positions 68 and 69, which forced peacekeepers at those positions to take shelter. No injuries to United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) personnel were reported, although indirect fire caused damage to those United Nations positions. On the same day, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) fired at least two guided missiles from the Alpha side across the ceasefire line, in response to earlier fire from the Bravo side that crossed the ceasefire line. UNDOF observed the continued presence of roadblocks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in the vicinity of two United Nations positions and a United Nations observation post, which affects the freedom of movement of UNDOF personnel. Incidents of threatening behaviour against UNDOF personnel from armed members of the opposition were also reported. On 12 August, two UNDOF vehicles were fired upon by an unidentified gunman. There were no injuries to troops or damage to either vehicle.

In Lebanon, the relative calm during the reporting period ended tragically with the devastating bomb explosion on 15 August in the Beirut suburb of Rouweiss, in which at least 24 people were killed and more than 300 injured. The Secretary-General strongly condemned the bombing — the deadliest such incident since 2005 — stressing the international community's continued support for Lebanon and urging all Lebanese to remain united, rally around their State institutions and safeguard their country's security and stability. President Sleiman convened the Higher Defence Council, which called for apprehending "those behind terrorist attacks in Lebanon". A previously unknown group, the Brigades of Aisha, claimed responsibility and threatened further attacks.

Other security incidents included the firing on 1 August of two rockets in the Yarze suburb of Beirut, where the Presidential Palace and Defense Ministry are located. On 4 August, the explosion of an IED uncovered at least 18 more ready-to-use IEDs, maps and future targets. On 18 August, the discovery of a vehicle containing 250 kilograms of explosives in Naameh, south of Beirut, led to the arrest of four people in connection with a car bombing ring.

The Syrian crisis continued to affect Lebanon's stability, especially in the border areas. On 18 August, five rockets struck Hermel without casualties. On 11 August, the mayor of Arsal was hurt when his convoy came under fire in the town of Al-Labweh. On 8 August, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) arrested three gunmen attempting to cross the border via Arsal, confiscating weapons and a suicide vest. On 9 August, two Turkish pilots were kidnapped on the road from Beirut International Airport in an incident believed to be linked to the abduction of Lebanese pilgrims in Syria.

Despite the efforts of Prime Minister-designate Salam, progress in forming a Government has yet to be seen. However, a 2 August decree to renew the term of the LAF Commander and the Chief of Staff for two years helped ensure institutional continuity in the Army. In a speech on Army Day, President Sleiman stated that the Army's duty will be difficult if one or more Lebanese actors were involved in extraterritorial conflicts, thereby causing external crises to be imported.

The area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained generally calm, despite almost daily Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace. UNIFIL, in coordination with the parties, is investigating the circumstances of an explosion in the Labouneh area, north of the Blue Line, on 7 August, in which four Israel Defense Forces personnel were reportedly injured. Preliminary findings confirm the presence of the IDF at the location, in violation of the Blue Line and in breach of the terms of the

cessation of hostilities and of resolution 1701 (2006). In a letter dated 14 August, Lebanon protested the incident. Determination is pending as to whether any other violation, such as the presence of unauthorized weapons or armed personnel, was involved. Hizbullah chief Hassan Nasrallah publicly claimed responsibility for the explosions, stating that Hizbullah fighters planted and detonated bombs as part of a controlled and deliberate operation.

In conclusion, despite an ever-challenging regional environment, we are finally observing long-awaited movement in the peace process in the form of direct negotiations. Let me stress our hope that such efforts mark a first opportunity to overcome the recent years of shared frustration at the political deadlock. Last week, we witnessed a promising opening in the efforts under way to develop a meaningful political initiative on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. We have now reached a decisive point. The test will be for both sides to go the distance and not disappoint their peoples. Now is also the moment to translate our collective call for action into a shared sense of urgency as leaders on both sides must realize that they have an opening that they cannot afford to lose. The Secretary-General and the United Nations, together with the Quartet, will continue to provide all possible support to their efforts.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.*